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International Journal of Organizational Analysis
Object field of organizational culture: methodological conceptualization
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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to develop a system view of the organizational culture, given entropy of theoretical and methodological outlooks on the phenomenon alongside simultaneous growth of number of research reports.

Design/methodology/approach – Sequential structural and ontological analysis of the Schein's (2004) point of view on organization culture enabled to form a way of system comprehension of the respective object field on conscious and unconscious levels.

Findings – Structural ontology of organizational culture represented by the mythopoetic concept of organization, which is a composition of unconscious motives reflecting standard and management peculiarities of functioning characteristic of a certain group.

Research limitations/implications – The proposed methodological discourse actualizes a hypothesis on *organizational unconscious* as a specific factor of organizational culture and begets a respective direction of the further researches.

Originality/value – This is the first methodological concept, that provides a system comprehension of the object field of organizational culture. The concept has important implications for methodological designs of further researches and systematization of already obtained data within the domain.

Keywords: organizational culture; organizational unconscious; system approach; object field.

Paper type – Research paper.

Introduction

Quantitative criterion of research actuality of organizational culture is vividly represented by the growth of relative publications. Qualitative part of importance and perspective of the given research is manifested through entropy of theoretical and methodological outlooks on the problem alongside simultaneous growth of number of research reports. In particular, the issue of setting boundaries for the object field of organizational culture still remains to be open. On the one hand, this situation could be considered as a favorable prerequisite for further generation and verification of separate hypotheses about nature, peculiarities and regularities of organizational culture. On the other hand, without unifying systematization of the obtained knowledge the further research progress risks becoming inapplicable for theoretic generalization of permanently replenishing knowledge and counterproductive for prospects of its practical use.

One of the methods of integration of "the scattered stones" into a single scientific-practical paradigm is connected with methodology competence. Here we speak neither about sterilization of methods and procedures of empirical facts fixation, nor about one-type theoretical denominator for obtained data interpretation. Such a methodological "conservatism" would be just as counterproductive opposition in respect to mentioned-above knowledge entropy. In this regard, the research process should remain maximally democratic to avoid different kinds of one-sidedness and tendentiousness, which unavoidably lead beyond the frames of scientific cognition into the sphere of dogmatic beliefs. However, the necessary integration of scattered pieces of knowledge might be achieved due to consolidation of scientific researches around a single viewpoint or at least around consistent opinions on the research object. At this, with a view to the broad and non-homogenous ontology of organizational culture as

well as its evident multifactorial nature, it would be more correct to speak not so much of an object but of an interdisciplinary *object field*. We suggest using system approach for methodological localization of such a field.

Literature Review

The beginning of the corresponding methodological tradition was set in the work of Katz & Kahn (1978), which stirred a great scientific interest due to authors' pioneer opinion (at the time of the first publication in 1966) on social psychology of organizations. Thus, this research was fulfilled in the frames of the theory of open systems (Bertalanffy, 1950, 1968), which was then developed in the works by Allport (1940, 1954), Miller (1978) and Parson (1951). On the other hand, the prospects of applying system approach to building a theory of organizations were mainly prepared by Lewin's works (1936, 1948, 1951). We need to distinguish the school of system methodology and theory of organizational and activity games of Shchedrovitsky (1966, 1982, 1995, 1988).

Analysis of the recent research works and publications proves the already mentioned multiplication of number of scientific works dedicated to the problem of organizational culture. We believe, the important contribution to development of determining the object field of corporate culture is being made by such classics and innovators of this sphere as Schein (2004), Kim & Quinn (2006), Vlasov, Manicheva and Sukhodolsky (2008), Zankovsky (2002), Karamushka (2009), Rensh (2009), Steklova (2007) and others. We are especially interested in specialized methodological generalizations by Zhog, Tarabakina, Babiev (2013) and Rogelberg (2004).

The majority of the listed authors as well as other contemporary researchers postulate or at least agree with the need and expedience of system comprehension of organizational culture. At the same time, the methodological task on description of the object field of organizational culture based on system approach is carried out, to our mind, only fragmentarily. Objective of this article is to formulate a variant of system comprehension of the organizational culture object field.

Methodology – ontological boundaries and structure of organizational culture

For this purpose we used a procedure of object localization in psychological research (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process), which relies on Eastern European system methodology tradition, initially established by Shchedrovitsky. The first step of this procedure is to set ontological boundaries and define structure of a research object (system), i.e. organizational culture. The aim of this step is to uncover morphology of the system appearing because of action of structure-forming factors of the system, such as *initial process and material*. This stage presupposes building of visualization according to axes principle: horizontal axis discloses *material* and ontological dimension, where organization of *material* takes place; vertical axis depicts *initial process* of the system characterized by homogeneity (isotropy) of organizing influence on the *material*.

To identify the material of system lets us use formal definition of organization culture by Schein: "The culture of a group <of people> can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to

perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2002, p. 17). Let us

suppose that *material* in the given case means shared basic assumptions of the group of

people (hereinafter – basic assumptions). In such a case, the *material* acquires organized

nature in ontological space, which is directly connected with the peculiarities of

organizational model. This allows determining the horizontal axis of structural-

ontological visualization (fig.1) the construction of which makes it possible to "fix" in a

consistent manner a research object (corporate culture).

Fig. 1

We need to point out that here and further we consider organized nature of

material in the frames of resource model of organization. In particular, by organization

we mean a group of people joint by hierarchic relationships, whose activity provides

realization of the following functions: 1) engagement of resources (material, financial,

labor, technological, information, communicative etc.); 2) transformation of resources

into organizational product (production, service, function, etc.); 3) commercial or non-

commercial realization of organizational product outside the group.

Methodology – system-forming process of organizational culture

Let us define the initial process as an adaptation-integration dichotomy that is

described in the cited above term by Schein. Our assumption about homogeneity of

organizing impact of this process on material relies on Schein's idea about internal

integration of the group and its external adaptation: "The most relevant model is that

evolved by sociology and group dynamics, based on the fundamental distinction

between any group's problems of (1) survival in and adaptation to its external

environment and (2) integration of its internal processes to ensure the capacity to

continue to survive and adapt. In other words, from an evolutionary perspective, we

need to identify the issues that any group faces from the moment of its origin through to

its state of maturity and decline" (Schein, 2002, p. 87). Therefore, adaptation-integration

dichotomy forms the vertical axis, which allows completion of construction of

structural-ontological matrix and identification of established segments (fig. 1).

As a result of organizing impact of the *initial process* on the *material,* the system

gets its structure formation and shaping of its specific morphology. However, at the

stage of segment identification (fig. 1) it becomes evident that fixation of object on the

grounds of Schein's formal definition did not disclose morphology of organizational

culture as a system. Thus, social culture (segment II) and resources (segment III) clearly

cannot act as components (subsystems) of organizational culture, more likely it is vice

versa: they are the components of the higher order system (supersystems). The latter can

be determined in terms of social market cultural space.

Nevertheless, the obtained visualization (fig. 1) allows us, firstly, to give

structural assessment of place and role of organizational structure in the supersystem.

This makes actual the issue of presence of functional connections of organizational

culture with other segments (see dotted arrows on fig. 1) and their peculiarities.

Secondly, we could re-think Schein's formal definition and emphasize on such

structure-forming factors of organizational culture as internal integration and formation

of basic assumptions of a group in the process of group activity.

System adjustment of organizational culture classic definition

Consequently, it is necessary to make correction of structural-ontological visualization (fig. 1) in the light of the above-described conclusions. Basic assumptions still acts as the material of the system. However, it is now expedient to define a relative ontological dimension as interaction of the group members (fig. 2) carried out in the process of group activity (hereinafter – interaction). We also need to specify the term 'initial process'. The emphasis is shifted to internal integration, which correlates with Schein's position: "Culture formation is always, by definition, a striving toward patterning and integration, even though in many groups their actual history of experiences prevents them from ever achieving a clear-cut, unambiguous paradigm" (Schein, 2002, p. 17). On the other hand: "Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin, in that leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organizations. Once cultures exist they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will or will not be a leader" (Schein, 2002, p. 22).

Fig. 2

Without entering debates with Schein on fineness of conceptual differentiation of *leadership, guidance* and *management,* let us define an organizational hierarchy as the *initial process*. On the one hand, this factor is a generic feature of any organization and it reflects qualitative characteristics of structuring and integration of a group. On the

other hand, this hierarchy makes a uniform organizing influence on the group in the sense of defining a place and role for each member of this group.

It is worth mentioning separately that we differ such terms as organizational hierarchy and management hierarchy according to the whole/part principle correspondingly. Management hierarchy rationally discriminates group members into leaders and subordinates, management and personnel and so on according to the attribute of formal status and corresponding powers. The given parameter is difficult to consider as the *initial process* because of its inhomogeneity. Thus, nearly every leader is at the same time someone's subordinate. Moreover, far from ever subordinate fulfils leading functions. Organizational hierarchy, in its turn, goes beyond management vertical and covers other dimensions of the group, including "vertical" ones (for example, time). Therefore, organizational hierarchy demonstrates structuring and integration of the whole organizational space.

Description of object field of the organizational culture

The next procedural step according to the procedure of object localization in psychological research (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) is identification and description of segments. We pay your attention to the fact that left semiplane of matrix (fig. 2) is connected with ideal-imaginative contents and the right one – with praxeological contents. Ideal-imaginative concept of organization is fixed in various kinds of standards – missions, policies, regulations, report and planning documentation and other regulatory-bureaucratic tools (segment II). This concept is refracted through cognitive-value constituent of an employee's individual worldview, which results in forming an attitude of this group member to organization. This attitude

lies in the basis of organizational loyalty (segment I). Subjective perception of one's

own place and role in organizational hierarchy is interconnected with organizational

behavior of the employee (segment IV). This behavior suggests interaction with other

members of the group in the context of management practice (segment III) which, in its

turn, embodies organizational bureaucracy.

Thus and so, at the present stage of our methodological discourse the object field

of organizational culture, as a system, is represented, first of all, by structural

composition of visualization (fig. 2). For the second, content of the object field is

revealed in segment-by-segment analysis of interaction between the *initial process* and

material of the system. For the third, analysis of intersegment and cross-segment

functional links (dotted arrows on fig. 2) allows us to identify and differentiate

processes, which distinguish from the *initial process,* but also influence functional

structure and organized nature of the *material*.

Please, note that each segment reflects a corresponding subsystem of

organizational culture and can be viewed as a separate system. In addition to that,

structural-ontological visualization may be complicated, if necessary, by way of adding

an additional perpendicular axis, thus transforming matrix from conditionally flat into

conditionally three-dimensional. Such a step may be taken only in the cases when

multicomponent characteristics of the *initial process* and/or *material* of the system

demand additional graphic degrees of freedom. Expedience of applying these methods

depends on conditions and tasks of a certain research while available depth of

methodological reduction may be defined in each separate case by empirical way only.

It is also necessary to underline absence of any grounds for monopolization of the

material of the system and the *initial process* chosen by us. Identification of these

parameters essentially depends on theoretical conceptions used while formulating these or other hypotheses.

Genesis and transformation of organizational culture

A criterion allowing us to evaluate degree of completeness ("minimal sufficiency") of methodological analysis for concrete research work is connected with the final stage of the procedure of object localization in psychological research (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process). It involves schematization of unfolding the *initial process* and segment-by-segment description of its genesis. Such a description should be consistent with the already used theoretical concepts. Conception of morphology of system received in this manner may be used for further theoretical analysis and empirical verification of formulated hypotheses.

In the case under consideration, unfolding of *initial process* begins with conception of organization by its author (line 1, fig. 3). Implementation of these ideas from the point of view of resource comprehension of organization presupposes the need to create a group hierarchy. Attraction of other people for author's conception implementation objectifies this hierarchy and signifies a debut of management practice (line 2, fig. 3). The management practice, in its turn, is directed on creation of organizational product (line 3, fig.3), which presupposes interaction and stipulates corresponding organizational behavior. In the process of the described interaction members of the group form a notion of ideal-imaginative concept of an organization and a certain attitude towards it appears (line 4, fig. 3). A combination of the above-described stages embodies the plan of organizational idea's author: it creates hierarchical group, starts organizational activity with the individual attitude towards it,

which in the process of group interaction leads to appearance of the first shared

(collective) basic assumptions of the group members about the organization (line 5,

fig. 3).

Fig. 3

Carried out schematization of initial process genesis and transformation of material

allows us formally to define the described-above methodological discourse as

completed and sufficient for further theoretical and practical steps on research of

organizational culture. However, is "completeness" and "sufficiency" always identical

to "fullness"?

Multi-level nature of organizational culture

    In the given publication we used theoretical views of Schein on organizational

culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions …" for localization of the object field.

In the other place of the same work Schein specifies that "a culture can be analyzed at

several different levels, with the term level meaning the degree to which the cultural

phenomenon is visible to the observer. Some of the confusion surrounding the definition

of what culture really is results from not differentiating the levels at which it manifests

itself. These levels range from the very tangible overt manifestations that one can see

and feel to the deeply embedded, unconscious, basic assumptions that I am defining as

the essence of culture" (Schein, 2002, p. 25).

The clarification of Schein on the level-arranged nature of organizational culture

sets an additional ("vertical") dimension of the object field according to criterion of

awareness/unawareness of the basic assumptions of the group. Thus, there arises the

necessity of introduction of one more axis reflecting characteristics of material of the

system, which were not taken into consideration before. Now schematization of the

object filed transforms from conditionally flat into conditionally three-dimensional one,

which presupposes differentiation of structural-ontological levels of awareness and

unawareness.

For the first level visualization given by us up above in the text (fig. 2) remains

actual. For schematization of unawareness level (fig. 4) we used theoretical conception

of analytical psychology of Jung (1969). This choice is determined, firstly, by absence

of clear conceptual identification of terms "subconscious" and "unconscious" by

Schein, which were used in wide generic context. Secondly, it is determined by historic

and cultural emphasis in views of Jung on unconscious mind.

Fig. 4

Thus, *material* of the system at the present structural-ontological level of

organizational culture is represented by unconscious assumptions, which acquire

organized nature in the process of interaction of the group members. Schematization of

the *initial process* (but not the process itself) also suffers some changes (fig. 4). At this

stage, the *initial process* unfolds as influence that the group members are unconscious

of (constellation) from the part of mythopoetic concept of organization. In accordance

with the position of analytical psychology (Jung & von Franz, 1964), an individual is

connected with organization due to projective-introjective mechanisms. We suppose

that these mechanisms constitute unconscious level of organizational culture. Thus,

characteristics of ideal-imaginative semiplane (segments I-II) are connected with the

structure, rules, standards, organized nature and rational functioning. This content

corresponds to one of the central psychodynamic factors in analytical psychology,

which embodies male (father) principle of the so-called *logos.* Praxeological semiplane

(segments III-IV) covers the ontology of management interaction between the group

members, their interconnection in frames of hierarchy. This sphere corresponds to the

psychodynamic factor, which in analytical psychology embodies female (mother)

principle or the so-called *eros*. Logos and eros embody the male and female archetypes.

Therefore, mythopoetic concept of organization is the composition of

unconscious (archetypical) motives or plots, which reflect standard and management

peculiarities of functioning specific of a certain group. Mythopoetic concept, on the one

hand, is constituted by projections of unconscious subject-matters of the group

members. On the other hand, it introjectively actualizes their value attitude to the

organization (segment I) and impacts stylistic peculiarities of organizational behavior

(segment IV). The described above actualizes a hypothesis on *organizational*

unconscious as a specific factor of organizational culture.

The unconscious level of the organizational culture

In analytical psychology on the basis of multiple cases of manifestation of

unconscious mind (fantasies, dreams, etc.) as well as massive cross-cultural research on

folklore and mythological material there were accumulated data, which allow

differentiation of *eros* and *logos* depending on the level of personal maturity and

cultural development of a certain person. These tendencies are discovered in

unconscious mind of the sexes as compensatory present countersexual mental

complexes (Anima – unconscious *eros* of a male, Animus – unconscious *logos* of a

female), equilibrating gender one-sidedness of conscious attitudes. Analytical

psychology distinguishes four stages of development of Animus and Anima,

accompanied by formation of corresponding unconscious images. Moreover, ideal-

imaginative characteristics of organization and relative values, to our mind, are

connected with Animus, whereas stylistic peculiarities of organizational behavior are

connected with Anima.

This approach provides opportunity to broaden comprehension of the

organizational culture object field on unconscious level through classification. In

table 1 we summarized stage peculiarities of Anima and Animus images

(Jung & Franz, 1964), briefly formulated relative ideal-imaginative characteristics of

organization and values adherent to them as well as stylistic peculiarities of group

members' behavior. We pay your attention to the fact that this table, first of all, has a

methodological value and specificates the hypothesis in respect of peculiarities of the

organizational culture object field on unconscious level (fig. 4). We have verified this

hypothesis in two stages.

Table 1

Organizational unconscious: results of preliminary testing of the idea

The first stage of the verification involved 166 respondents out of employees of a commercial organization (which has been successfully functioning in Ukrainian market for over 10 years) who have been working in the same office. Gender characteristics of sampling – 54,2% of women. Employment history of the respondents in the given organization was from 4 to 11 years. First, the respondents were offered a questionnaire for evaluation, which contained ideal-imaginative classification of the organization (table 1), and then – another questionnaire with the stylistic peculiarities of organizational behavior. In both cases the respondents evaluated the degree of correspondence of questionnaire information in respect of their organization to the scale from 0 ("no correspondence at all") to 9 ("full correspondence"). The obtained data was statistically analyzed. The comparison of averages was made by T-test for paired samples. Factors within each of the four pairs have discovered statistically valid correlation (p<0,01). Grades in the pair that corresponds to the second stage of development of Animus and Anima turned to be the highest and their average exponents significantly differed (p<0,01) from the exponents of the other pairs. The other statistically valid differences between the pairs have not been found. In 5 months a recurrent research was carried out in the same collective of the same organization. Retesting sampling amounted to 162 respondents (all of them took part in the initial inquiry). Statistical analysis of the retesting results completely confirmed the previous conclusions.

At the second stage of hypothesis verification the research involved 102 respondents working in 62 commercial organizations (14 production and 48 trade mediation activity) and 40 non-commercial organizations (with the personnel number from 20 to 400 people). A single respondent represented each organization. All

organization had no subsidiaries. Gender characteristics of sampling – 36% of women.
Age range was from 22 to 58 years of age, employee history at organizations – from 2
to 16 years. 35% involved top-level and mid-level executives, other respondents –
specialists of sales departments, marketing departments, clients' service, advertisement
and PR departments, HR. Age of organizations at the moment of research constituted
from 7 to 16 years. The author carried out the research in frames of post-graduate course
of theoretical and practical studies in major "Organizational and Economic Psychology"
in the University (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) in 2013-
2016.

This time the respondents were offered a single questionnaire that combined the
contents of the two questionnaires used on the previous stage. Evaluation system (from
0 to 9) remained the same. After that each participant was offered to remember a story,
which, to the respondent's opinion, was the organizational allegory or has a symbolic
meaning for the organization. At this, they were explained that this story should not
necessarily be based on real events or happen in the organization itself. The respondents
were deliberately not given any other instructions, however, while selecting material for
further analysis there were used the following criteria: 1) a story was not made up by the
respondent himself/herself; 2) it was heard by the respondent many times from two or
more colleagues of his/her organization; 3) the last time included – not more than a year
ago; 4) there are human or anthropomorphic characters present in the plot who interact
or are connected by certain relationships.

Characteristics of the characters' images as well as peculiarities of their
relationships, if necessary, were specified in the interview with the respondents after
narrative was over. The stories were arranged in accordance with the criteria described
in table 1. In situations when either evident attributes were absent or attributes of two or

more development stages of Anima and Animus were simultaneously present we

excluded such stories from sampling. We have chosen 68 stories altogether. The

analysis of variance (ANOVA and Hochberg`s GT2 criterion) has confirmed presence

of the tendency ($p<0,05$) between the levels of organizational culture from

questionnaires data and relative characteristics of stories. This allows us to estimate the

above-described presumptions on typological peculiarities of the object field (table 1) as

the ones that justifiably may be used as a methodological concept for further theoretical

and empirical researches of organizational culture.

Conclusion

The described methodological discourse relying on the series of structural-ontological

visualizations made it possible to formulate one of the possible variants of system

comprehension of the organizational culture object field. Following Schein in

considering organizational culture as shared basic assumptions of a group, we point out

the following structural-ontological and genetic peculiarities of the given phenomenon.

Firstly, the basic assumptions are formed in the process of interaction of group

members, which is stipulated by the organizational hierarchy. This, in its turn, stipulates

ideal-imaginative ad praxeological peculiarities of morphology of organizational culture

as a system. Secondly, organizational culture geneses presupposes implementation of

organizational idea through building a hierarchic group and appearance of relationships

among its members in order to create an organizational product. In the process of the

above-mentioned, the group members form individual attitude towards ideal-

imaginative concept of organization. Resulting from intra-group interaction there appear

the first shared (collective) basic assumptions of organization. Thirdly, organizational

culture has conscious and unconscious levels. The structural ontology of the latter is represented by the mythopoetic concept of organization, which is a composition of unconscious motives reflecting standard and management peculiarities of functioning characteristic of a certain group. Fourthly, mythopoetic concept of organization, on the one hand, is constituted by projections of unconscious subject-matters of the group members. On the other hand, it introjectively actualizes their value attitude to the organization and influences stylistic peculiarities of organizational behavior. The described above actualizes a hypothesis on *organizational unconscious* as a specific factor of organizational culture. Versatile verification of this hypothesis, to our mind, is the important perspective of the further researches in the sphere of organizational psychology.

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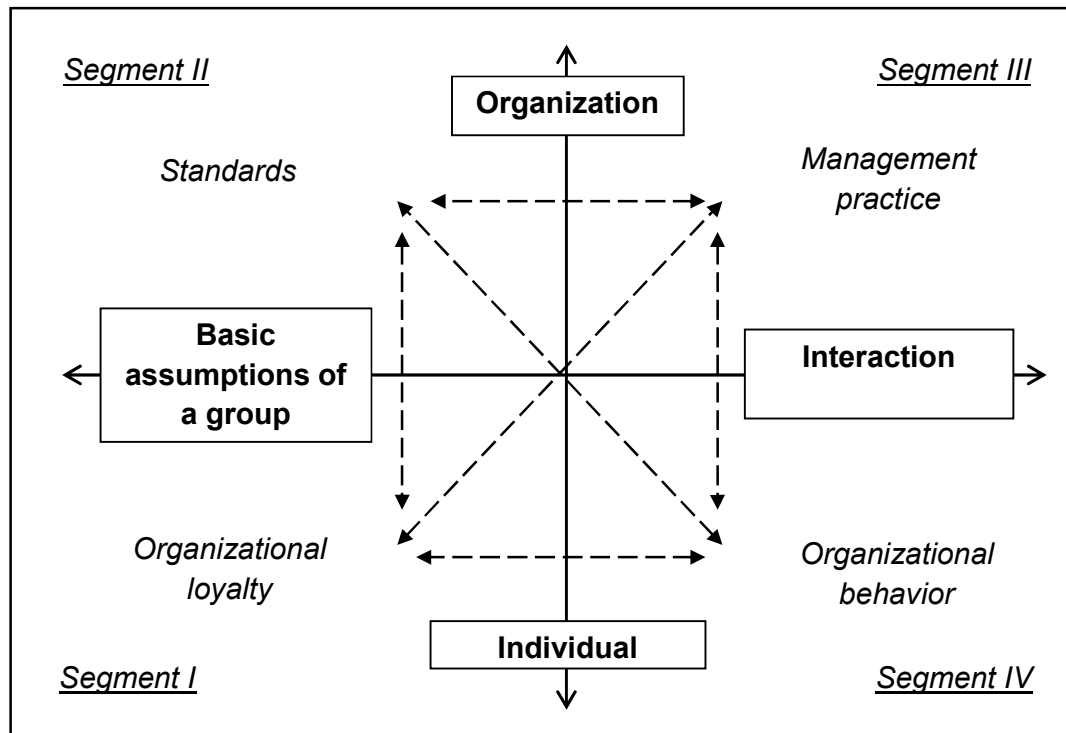
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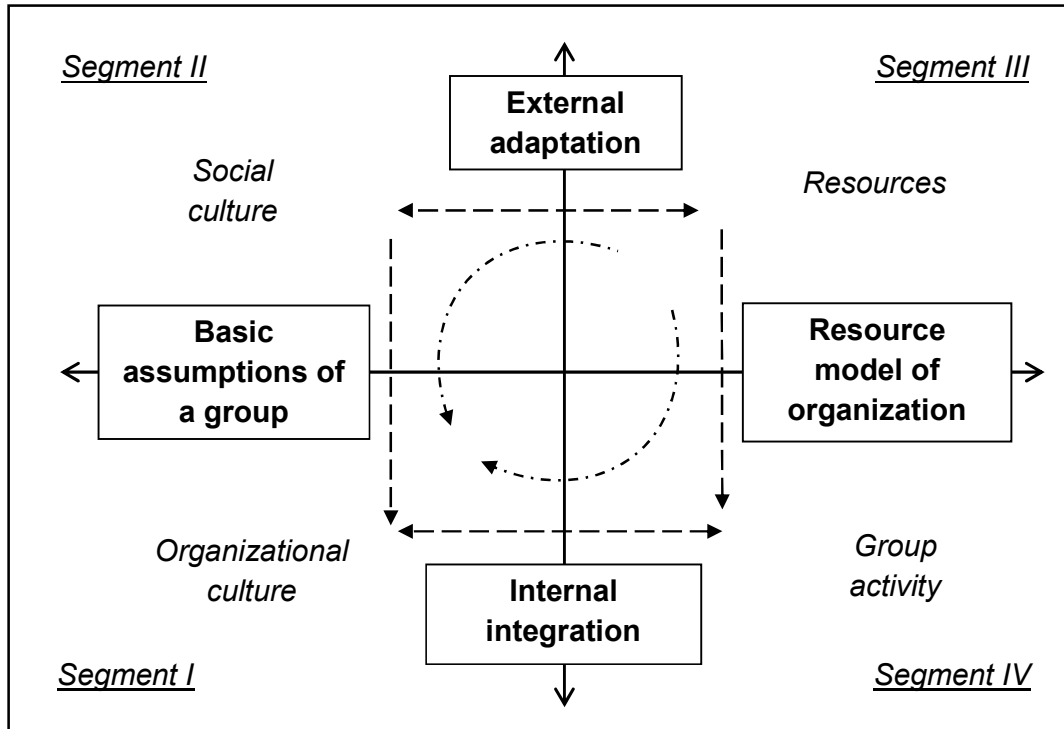
Figure. 1. Structural-ontological visualization of the system based on formal definition

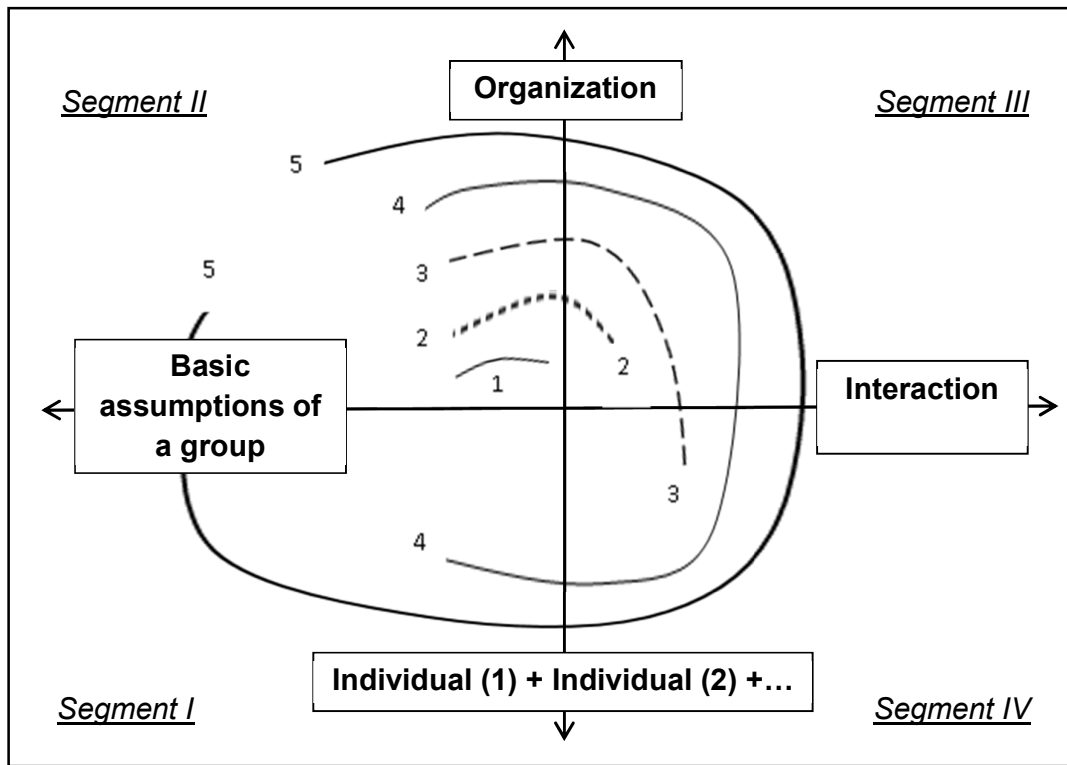of organizational culture by Schein.

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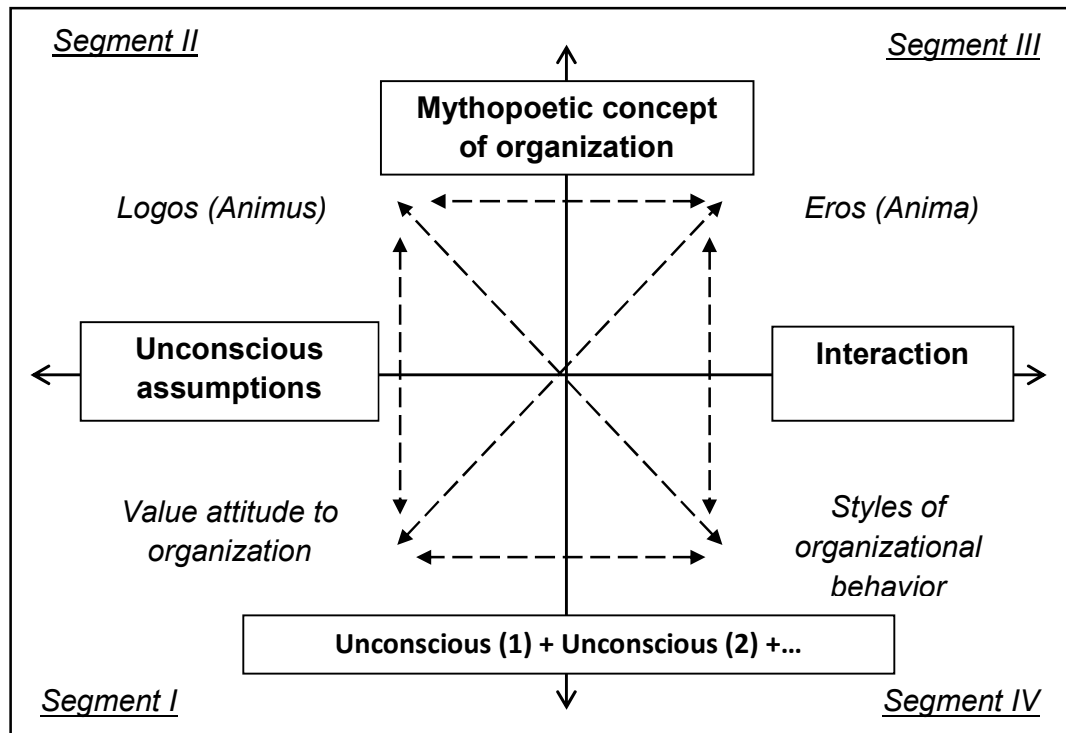7   *Figure. 2.* Structural-ontological visualization of the organizational culture object field.

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Figure. 3. Genesis of *initial process* and transformation of organized nature of *material* of organizational culture.

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Figure 4. Unconscious structural-ontological level of the organizational culture object

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Table 1

Classification of the organizational culture object field (unconscious level)

Stage peculiarities of Animus image	Ideal-imaginative characteristics of organization (values)	Stage peculiarities of Anima image	Stylistic peculiarities of organizational behavior
Physical vigor	Organization as a place for survival. Adaptation to simple and rigid rules, value of belonging to organization as a referent group.	Instinctivity, biologism	Personal indifference, attribution of relationships, management radicalism, friend-or-foe division. Asceticism of atmosphere. Primitive management hierarchy.
Initiative, Planned nature	Organization as a place for competition. Lack of option to slogan "Be the best or be the first". Value of "self-sacrifice" to achieve organizational aims (indices).	Romanticism, sexuality	Differentiation according to criteria of "strong", "weak", "winners" and "losers". Paranoid atmosphere. Inefficiency of formal management hierarchy. Actual management according to the leadership principle.
Intellectuality	Organization as a place for professional improvement. Value of an individual contribution to efficiency and	Spirituality, ethics	Differentiation according to criteria of competency and productivity. Distinguishing of personal characteristics

	productivity at the expense of forethought, rationality, optimization, etc.		and preferences. Atmosphere of value of cooperation and mutual understanding. Individual approach in management.
Intelligence	Organization as a place for personal artistic fulfillment. Philosophy of transformation of the world. Value of innovation, uniqueness, environmental friendliness and humanism.	Wisdom	Differentiation according to criteria of artistic potential. Atmosphere of personal maturity and personal artistic fulfillment. Management does not make hierarchy for relationships and functions according to coordination principle.